

### **Statement of Thomas F. Wieder on HB 5974**

Good morning, Madam Chair and members of the Committee. I am a resident of Ann Arbor and hold American History, Master of Public Policy and Law Degrees from the University of Michigan. I am here to speak against House Bill 5974.

The primary sponsor of the bill argues that this proposed change in how Michigan awards its electoral votes would give Michigan more influence in Presidential elections. To the contrary, the change would likely have little or no effect on Michigan's clout in the process, and any effect might, in fact, be negative.

The bill represents a short-term and narrow view of electoral history. It seems to assume that, because Michigan has voted Democratic in the last six elections, it will forever do so, and by large enough margins that Republicans won't even put up a significant fight here. As a result, it suggests, Michigan will be ignored if it keeps the winner-take-all system. This overlooks the fact that Michigan voted Republican in the five previous Presidential elections.

It will take just a single competitive Presidential contest in Michigan to demonstrate the folly of the bill. Michigan is still the eighth-largest state, and its 16 electoral votes are a major prize, if awarded together. If they are divided under the bill's formula, the prize becomes much smaller, and Michigan will not attract the attention its size deserves.

Applying the bill's formula to the last 12 Presidential elections, the difference between the electoral votes going to the Democratic and Republican candidates would have averaged just 6.5 votes. It would have produced such oddities as Gerald Ford getting just one more vote than Jimmy Carter, instead of the 21 to 0 that he actually received. In 1980, Ronald Reagan would have received 12 electoral votes to Carter's 9, instead of getting all 21.

Presidential campaigns look for opportunities to gain the most electoral votes for the smallest amount of resources. Under the bill's formula, that would seldom lead them to pay much attention to Michigan. Iowa awards its 6 electoral votes, winner-take-all, but is less than one-third of Michigan's population. Colorado awards its 9 electoral votes, winner-take-all, and is about half Michigan's population. Why build a state Presidential campaign organization and pay high TV advertising rates in a state of nearly 10 million just to pick up a handful of electoral votes, when more votes can be snared by a successful effort in a smaller, winner-take-all state? The answer is, the national campaigns wouldn't come looking for the votes in Michigan.

The bill's formula for awarding delegates is complicated and likely to confuse both voters and the media, and it seems to be totally arbitrary. Why does the winning candidate get one additional delegate for each 1.5% of the popular vote over 50%? Why not for each 1% or 2% or 2.5%?

If it makes sense to award some electoral votes on a popular vote basis, why not all of them? And isn't it time to scrap the 18<sup>th</sup>-century electoral vote system entirely and just popularly elect the President? Under a straight popular-vote system, Michigan's nearly 10

million population will give it clout and attract the candidates' attention more than the alternatives.

It doesn't take a federal Constitutional amendment to accomplish this. Michigan should join an effort called the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact (NVPIC). By regular state legislative action, a state can agree that all of its electoral votes will be awarded to the national popular vote winner. The Compact would only go into effect when states join it that have, combined, at least the 270 electoral votes necessary to elect a President. Already, 10 states and the District of Columbia, representing 165 electoral votes, have signed on. A bill to do this has been introduced in the Legislature, but it has not been acted upon.

This bill will do nothing to rationalize our process for electing a President and will not increase Michigan's influence in the process.